United Nations E/CN.5/2012/NGO/11

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
17 November 2011

Original: English

Commission for Social Development
Fiftieth session
1-10 February 2012
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: poverty eradication

Statement submitted by Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, VIVAT International and Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.5/2012/1.

11-59783 (E) 091211

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Statement

Climate change, agriculture and poverty eradication

Few will disagree that our planet is in crisis, threatened by the consequences of social injustice, as witnessed by the increasing gap between the 1 per cent and the 99 per cent; by civil and international war, which continues to be the dominant means by which human conflicts are resolved even in the twenty-first century; and by our increasing inability to manage successfully human impacts on the Earth's resource and life-support systems, as evidenced by the precariousness of food security in all world regions. It is within this larger context that plans to eradicate poverty must be considered. In addition, it is our view that understanding the nexus between human-induced climate change and industrial agriculture is fundamental to successful planning for poverty eradication. Unless otherwise noted, ideas presented in the sections below are drawn from *The Wheel of Life: Food, Climate, Human Rights and the Economy* by Debbie Barker of the Center for Food Safety.

Human-induced climate change obstructs poverty eradication

Food security

Climate change exacerbates poverty and obstructs its eradication through its impact on food security and rural agriculture. Indeed, while countries in the global South presently contribute only about 30 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions (historically even less), according to the World Bank they will suffer about 80 per cent of the effects of climate change, especially, according to the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development, the 70 per cent of the poor who depend on agriculture for their subsistence, as extreme weather events, such as droughts and floods, and increased pest and disease migrations, lead to failed harvests. Recent studies have shown that such climate variability will affect the poorest regions of the globe, such as sub-Saharan Africa, where yields are expected by the World Food Programme to decline by 20-40 per cent, and South Asia, where wheat production, for example, is expected by the International Food Policy Research Institute to decline by 57 per cent by 2050.

Migration

Attempts to eradicate poverty are further obstructed when environmental shocks and stresses push people living in poverty to leave their homes, that is to migrate within or to seek refuge across national borders. This may be brought on by the slow degradation of natural resources leading to shortages of water, food and arable land and damage and depletion of community resources. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the displacement of the largest number of persons is, however, due to sudden catastrophic natural disasters.

Also leading to displacement, dispossession and impoverishment of marginalized communities, large tracts of land within some of the poorest countries are being purchased by cash-rich countries who claim that these foreign land acquisitions will provide food security and lead to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Dubbed "land grabs" by civil society groups, these land-use schemes actually leave local people, such as small farmers and peasant, indigenous and other

marginalized communities, with no access to their traditional land and homes and without livelihoods to provide for their basic needs. Moreover, in contrast to what investors promise, the majority of the projects impoverish the local population and contribute to climate change. The food and fuel crops which are grown are exported back to rich nations. Moreover, these monoculture industrial crops not only shrink biodiversity but require a large amount of chemical inputs, which increase greenhouse gas emissions and deplete water, soil and other natural resources.

Gender

Rural women are the backbone of agriculture throughout much of the developing world. They are seed savers and breeders, growers, producers, processors and marketers, according to the organization Women Thrive Worldwide producing as much as 80 per cent of the food in some developing countries, and, according to Women's Funding Network, 35 to 45 per cent of their gross domestic product. According to Women Thrive Worldwide, globally rural women produce half of the world's food. However, the consequences of climate change make it harder for them to maintain and increase agricultural productivity. The difficulty of accessing depleted sources of natural resources, such as wood and water, increases women's workloads, affecting their health, reducing time to participate in community decision-making processes and adding extra stress to caring for children and the elderly. Additionally, due to norms of gender inequality within cultures, gender impacts of national policies and programmes addressing climate change and food security initiatives are ignored. For example according to the Committee on World Food Security, women farmers receive only 5 per cent of agricultural extension services worldwide. Thus women's full and effective participation in food production is limited and the feminization of poverty is exacerbated.

Industrial agriculture contributes to climate change and exacerbates poverty

During the last century, a highly centralized, energy-intensive global system of industrial agriculture began replacing small-scale, multifunctional food systems whereby local farmers grew food primarily for local communities. This globalized industrial food and agriculture model is characterized by high and intensive usage of energy, chemicals, pesticides and water, production of mono-crops and use of pollution-producing transport systems. Climate change, resource depletion and food scarcity have resulted from these agricultural practices. In fact, a recent World Bank report concluded that current agricultural practices account for more than 30 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, including gases more potent than CO_2, such as nitrous oxide and methane. Besides contributing to climate change, the environmental impact of industrial agriculture leads to the abuse of human rights, for example by affecting the ability to grow food, intensifying hunger in all world regions and contributing to the economic breakdown of farmer livelihoods and rural communities, and so renders more untenable the conditions of people living in poverty.

The way forward

Based on the industrial agricultural model, the green revolution and genetic engineering of seeds and crops, which were earlier attempts to ensure food security and indirectly eradicate poverty, have failed. The green revolution has degraded natural resources essential to long-term food security, while performance and the

scientific record to date question the credibility of claims that genetic engineering would mitigate climate change. Alternative approaches must be devised. We therefore propose that plans for eradicating poverty and ensuring food security be based on parallel efforts to curb climate change and to transition societies away from the industrial agricultural model to an ecologically based agriculture that respects both Earth rights and human rights.

Recommendation 1

An agriculture that maintains ecological integrity and helps secure human rights must replace industrial agriculture. Such a paradigm for action, which would place nature at the heart of economic growth, should be characterized by:

(a) Use of low-cost, viable agro-ecological organic farming methods;

(b) Encouragement of farmer innovation, knowledge and access to appropriate technology;

(c) Promotion of dignified livelihoods;

(d) Support of vital community-based economies, such as peasant agriculture and small-scale farmers;

(e) Respect for culturally diverse agricultural practices;

(f) Planning which includes local people and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and takes into account the effects of pollution, loss of land to industry and loss of biodiversity.

Essential to the success of such a transition is the role of civil society. Issues raised in considering the nexus between climate change and industrial agriculture present a host of new challenges for involvement. As noted in *The Wheel of Life*, civil society can shift discussions away from the assumptions that a hungry world can be fed and climate change curbed through the use of agricultural technologies. They can further persuade donor and business communities to reassess potential biases towards industrial agriculture and redirect funds to ecologically based models. Civil society NGOs can also build coalitions that highlight the connections between cross-sectoral issues and work towards common solutions to issues that seem disconnected from one another.

Recommendation 2

The role of civil society must be acknowledged in national plans of action for poverty eradication, curbing climate change and transitioning to an ecological and human rights based agriculture. NGOs should be called upon to collaborate in their implementation.

Note: Statement endorsed by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council: Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Carmelite NGO, Congregations of St. Joseph, Dominican Leadership Conference, Franciscans International, International Federation of Women in Legal Careers, International Federation of Women Lawyers, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Passionists International, Sisters of Charity Federation, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas and UNANIMA International.